

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release March 24, 1980

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RECLASSIFICATION PROPOSED FOR THE LEOPARD

With commercial exploitation for its fur now under control by strict international regulation, the leopard should be reclassified from endangered to the threatened category to more accurately reflect its true biological status, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed in the March 24, 1980, Federal Register.

"Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range; "threatened" means that it may become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Commercial trade, still a potential threat to the big spotted cat, would continue to be banned under the proposal, which is based on data from three recent studies that provided more information about the animal than was available when it was listed as endangered in June 1970. These reports show that the leopard is still fairly abundant and widely distributed in much of sub-Saharan Africa. The proposed reclassification would apply to leopard populations in all African countries south of the Sahara, except for Somalia for which no data are available.

As a threatened species, the leopard could be imported for scientific, propagational, educational, and zoological exhibition purposes with the required Federal permits. In addition, the Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to ease its restrictions to allow the importation of sport hunting trophies as an economic incentive to encourage the leopard's conservation by landowners in Africa where in some areas it is indiscriminately destroyed as a predator. Trophy hunting brings additional jobs and income to African citizens and landowners and added revenue to the governments from tourists and the sale of hunting licenses that may cost \$500 or more. It is expected that reclassifying the leopard to give it some economic value will lead to measures to protect it as a valuable resource.

Sport trophy importations of the leopard would have to be in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora which protects the leopard as an Appendix I species. No commercial trade is allowed in Appendix I species but sport trophies may be approved on a case-by-case basis. The Convention requires two permits for importing and exporting Appendix I species--an export permit from the country of origin and an import permit from the importing country. The permits from each country must be backed by scientific findings that the activity or its purpose will not be detrimental to the species' continued survival. No separate permit under the Endangered Species Act would be required to import the leopard as a sport trophy; it would be required, however, for imports for other purposes.

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The proposal to reclassify the leopard results in part from the review mandated by Congress after a species has been listed for 5 years, and in part, from a petition by Safari Club International. The Fish and Wildlife Service cautioned, however, that the leopard's status under the Endangered Species Act might have to be reconsidered should it be transferred by Convention countries to Appendix II, a category that requires only an export permit from the country of origin.

The Interior agency requests comments and additional data from all interested persons and organizations. These should be submitted by June 24, 1980, to the Director, OES, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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